

For Immediate Release
July 13, 2000

Contact: Sunny Mays Schust
(202) 624-5800

EPA and FHWA Approve AASHTO Environmental Streamlining Pilot Projects

Ten transportation projects in seven states have been selected as part of a pilot program to find new ways to streamline and accelerate the delivery of transportation improvements, while achieving better environmental protection.

John Horsley, Executive Director of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials which initiated the pilot program, said "Everyone says they want to cut federal red tape - and it's up to us to find out how. We want to protect the environment, but we also must deliver the transportation projects essential to the American economy."

The pilot program concept sprang from a meeting last year of top officials from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and AASHTO. Projects were nominated by the states and have been accepted by the agencies as demonstrating innovation in environmental review and processing.

In its letter of endorsement to AASHTO, the FHWA said, "These pilot projects present an opportunity to showcase and focus on various aspects of this process, such as early coordination, integrating environmental concerns into the planning process, and establishing project specific time frames."

AASHTO President Tom Warne, Director of the Utah Department of Transportation, announced the launching of the program this week in a meeting of state transportation officials in Chicago. He said, "Lessons will be learned from these preliminary projects, and those lessons will be applied to other projects nationwide. Most importantly, it reflects a new approach, states working together with the federal agencies as a team to achieve streamlining goals and better environmental protection."

Projects range from an endangered species habitat protection program in Riverside, California to a \$1 billion intermodal port access corridor to the port of Newark/Elizabeth Seaport and Airport in New Jersey. A fact sheet on the projects follows. Other states in the program are Florida, Georgia, Oregon, Texas, and Wisconsin.

AASHTO is a non-profit, multi-modal organization representing the departments of transportation of the fifty states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

[Fact Sheet](#)

Fact Sheet
Environmental Streamlining Pilot Program
American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials

California-Community and Environment Transportation Acceptability Process (CETAP)

In California's Riverside County, the population is expected to double in the next 20 years, from 2.5 million to 5 million. This pilot project is targeted at identifying and preserving vital transportation corridors while conserving habitat and watershed areas in the western portion of the county. Development of planning efforts are being made simultaneously to balance habitat, open space, and transportation decisions in this high growth area.

California-Caltrans/FHWA/EPA Partnership Effort

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) seeks to develop joint initiatives between itself, the Federal Highway Administration, and the Environmental Protection Agency during transportation planning and project development. Caltrans is hoping to build a true partnership with the agencies by exploring and understanding each agency's mission through collaboration and business interaction.

California-Caltrans/State and Federal Resource Agency Partnership Effort

Caltrans and the state and Federal resource/regulatory agencies interact on many issues during the project development process. These agencies are required by law to review proposals for new projects and issue permits that ensure compliance with environmental laws. This increases Caltrans workload and therefore slows project delivery. Caltrans is implementing a partnering effort that will allow for early and constructive participation between itself and the agencies. This is the state's first effort to apply some of the streamlining techniques from the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21).

Florida-Developing an Environmental Streamlining Process for use in Florida

The Florida Department of Transportation and the FHWA are developing an environmental review process to better integrate environmental considerations with all involved agencies and organizations earlier in the planning process. A Memorandum of Agreement will be drafted to include specific time frames for applicable agency actions, procedures for communication and documentation, and levels of detail and analysis procedures.

Georgia-Environmental Streamlining for the Georgia Rail Passenger Program

Georgia has developed a comprehensive rail passenger program that includes commuter rail, intercity rail, interstate rail, and high speed interstate rail. This environmental streamlining program will rely on cooperation from the Federal Railroad Administration, the Federal Transit Administration and the Federal Highway Administration. The Georgia Department of Transportation will define a single process for environmental review and approval that fulfills multiple agency requirements and promotes timely decision making. The process will also ensure environmental protection and teamwork between participating agencies.

New Jersey-Roadway/Intermodal Connector to Newark/Elizabeth Seaport and Airport

The New Jersey Department of Transportation has conceived a roadway/intermodal connector facility that would strengthen highway and inter-facility access between the Newark/Elizabeth Seaport and Airport Complex, as well as major intermodal rail and trucking distribution facilities in the region. Strong partnerships will be built between state and Federal environmental agencies to not only obtain project approvals, but to also take advantage of opportunities to enhance the environmental quality of the region. The information obtained and developed during this project is to become part of a Geographical Information System (GIS) database.

New Jersey-Parallel Processing of Section 106 and Section 4(f) Requirements

Separate and sequential processes are currently needed to comply with the Federal Historic Preservation Act and the U.S. DOT Act for projects affecting historic properties. The New Jersey Department of Transportation, in collaboration with the FHWA and the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office, is attempting to craft a process that will fully address the legal requirements of the two separate laws without compromising the validity or sequence of decisions. By developing this process together, the public will receive the benefits of more efficient project delivery.

Oregon-Integrating NEPA and Statewide Transportation Planning

Oregon is one of a handful of states that mandates the development of transportation system plans along with local land use plans. But currently decisions made during this planning are reached without the benefit of environmental analysis. By moving the federally mandated National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review to this early planning stage, ODOT hopes to improve land use decisions and streamline transportation project delivery. By putting the information needed by decision makers and the public at the point it is first needed, the new process will eliminate redundancy and produce better results for both transportation and the environment.

Texas-Loop 12/1H 35E Corridor Major Investment Study and Environmental Assessment

Plans for this \$1 billion, 13.5 mile project in Dallas include a mix of existing highway expansion, reversible HOV lanes, commuter or light rail, bicycle, and pedestrian improvements. But the project faces environmental hurdles relating to air quality impacts and river crossings, as well as funding identification. Through a partnership working group of local, regional, state and federal agencies, the Texas Department of Transportation plans to use continuous collaboration and coordination to streamline the environmental evaluation and approval process. As different challenges arise, the work group setting will provide a forum for cooperation and involvement by agencies, and for achieving community consensus and support.

Wisconsin-EIS Screening Worksheets

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation will develop a Screening Worksheet format for Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) with the help of the FHWA. These worksheets aid in environmental assessment and are effective in determining whether projects require EISs. This proposal will provide uniformity between EISs and will ensure all environmental issues are identified and evaluated, but most importantly, follow a structured format.